

How to use these talking points

Here are talking points for each of WSPTA's Top 5 priorities for the 2026 legislative session. These talking points are not to be read word for word; they are to help you prepare for - and execute - successful meetings with legislators. The talking points for each priority include:

- Brief background on the issue (Why is this a problem? What are we trying to solve?)
- WSPTA proposed solutions (adopted by delegates at WSPTA Legislative Assembly)
- Questions to ask your district or school to help form your personal facts or story (if time allows - responses from your district could take time)
- "Asks" to make of legislators
- Link to the issue one-pager that has more detail about the topic

Recommended Meeting Flow

Every meeting with a legislator should include a quick overview of [WSPTA's Top 5 legislative priorities](#). Meetings are usually around 15 minutes, so you should pick one of the priorities you would like to focus on during your meeting.

1. **Introductions** - Quick introductions
2. **Overview** - Share a brief overview of WSPTA's Top 5 issues
3. **Highlighted Priority** - Describe the issue your local PTA or council is most passionate about, be concise and to the point.
4. **Fact or Statistic** - Share a noteworthy fact or statistic that relates to this issue. You can find these in the background section of this document and in the issue one-pager.
5. **Personal Story** - Share a personal story that goes with the issue. Who on your team has a relevant story to share? We're giving you facts - you supply the personal story from your student, your school, your district to make a strong impact.
6. **The Ask** - Be specific about what you want them to do (for example, vote yes on a specific bill.)
7. **The Close** - Share three to five words for the person you are meeting with to remember.

Note: Legislators ask for no papers, please. Follow up meetings with an email thank you and share any additional information such as a link to WSPTA's Top 5 Legislative Priorities digitally.

Note 2: It is not appropriate to share what you hear in one legislator meeting with another legislator or to say that you heard "XYZ" from one legislator to another legislator. You can say, "We have heard 'XYZ' in a recent meeting. What do you think?" But again, no naming names.

Washington State PTA Top 5 Legislative Priorities - 2026

1. Closing the Funding Gaps
2. Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis
3. Addressing Funding, Inclusion, and Supports in Special Education
4. Preventing and Reducing Gun Violence
5. Expanding School Construction Funding Options

Additional Legislator Meeting Planning Resources available in the Focus on Advocacy Toolkit:

- How to Have a Successful Meeting with Legislators
- Build Your Pitch

Closing the Funding Gaps

Background

- An increasing number of school districts are in financial crisis, due to a variety of factors out of their control, including declines in enrollment, increases in operational and services costs, loss of significant local or federal revenue, and persistent gaps in state funding.
- Per state and federal law, schools have legal obligations to serve students with disabilities, regardless of the cost. In the 2025 legislative session, the Legislature made a significant investment in special education, but funding gaps still remain.
- The allocation for school operating costs (informally called MSOC) has not kept pace with the actual costs for things like required insurance, utilities, technology, and curriculum adoption. When districts must use enrichment levies to pay basic expenses, students are the ones who lose out on programs and services that will help them be successful.
- Many districts are consistently underfunded for student transportation under the current formula and close this gap using other state funds, special levies or enrichment levies.

Talking Points/Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding)

- Avoid any cuts or decreases to school district funding this year, particularly as a result of declining enrollment. Districts can't take another hit. Even small reductions in funding can erode progress on student learning and well-being.
- Reinvest K-12 funding lost by districts due to declining enrollment back into the district to help stabilize the system.
- Prioritize new revenues or portions of new revenues that will increase investments in K-12 education funding over time.
- Support legislation and/or funding to close existing funding gaps in basic education for MSOC (Materials, Supplies and Operating Costs) so that state funding reflects and keeps pace with inflation and actual costs.
- Our schools are more than classrooms – they are safe spaces, community hubs, and trusted environments where students receive meals, access health care, and obtain critical services to support learning and success.
- We know there are many competing needs, but the gaps will only continue to widen if this is pushed into the future, forcing districts to close neighborhood schools, lay off staff, and cut programs that help kids stay engaged in school.

Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- Is your district experiencing declining enrollment? If yes, how will the district respond to less per student funding?
- What is the difference between what the state pays for MSOC and the district's actual costs?
- Is the state on track to meet your transportation expenses? If not, do you use enrichment levy dollars to make up this gap?

- How much of a gap does your district still face related to special education funding, after the changes made last session? Do they use local enrichment levy dollars to make up this gap?
- How many highly mobile students (students in foster care, students facing homelessness or housing instability, incarcerated students, migrant students, and students in military families) are in your district? What additional funding would help better serve highly mobile students?
- What programs or services has the district been offering that it no longer can afford to continue?
- Do you have an idea of how much funding will be cut due to the loss of certain federal Title programs?

“Asks” of your legislators

- Will you support reinvesting any K-12 funding that would be lost due to declining enrollment back into the district to keep programs stable?
- Will you support funding the actual cost of basic education costs, including insurance, utilities and technology – and closing those gaps over the next few fiscal years?
- Will you support bills to bridge the gap to fully fund student transportation, particularly for students who are homeless or in the foster youth system to stabilize their attendance at school?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing these critical funding issues? (Find current bill numbers on the [WSPTA blog](#) or in the Focus on Advocacy newsletters and look on the bill list for “Closing the Funding Gaps.”)

Issue One-Pager

Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis

Background

- Nearly half of all adolescents have experienced some sort of mental health issue, and 1 in 5 of these is labeled as serious (per the National Institute of Mental Health).
- In 2023 in Washington state, 15% of 8th graders considered suicide and 13% made a plan to commit suicide, with 9% attempting suicide in that one year alone.
- There are not enough people in the pipeline applying for relevant training and graduate level programs.
- Lack of funding for mental health staff forces some districts to use educators and administrators who are not adequately trained to deliver these services.

Talking Points/Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding)

- The legislature increased staff ratios for school nurses, psychologists, social workers and counselors, and that is very much appreciated, but more is needed to fill the gaps to ensure all students have access to the resources they need.
- Please support programs and incentives to recruit, train, and retain mental health professionals.
- Consider creative solutions to partner with higher education and community providers to support student mental health.
- Encourage the legislature to add an additional day of professional development for ALL school staff, so that every employee has the training to support students experiencing mental health issues.

Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- How many nurses, counselors, social workers or psychologists are in your student's school or district? How many are paid by the state and how many from local levy funds?
- Where do they think the greatest need is for increasing staffing ratios?

“Asks” of your legislators

- Is student mental health support a priority for your caucus?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing this critical issue? (Find current bill numbers on the [WSPTA blog](#) or in the Focus on Advocacy newsletters and look on the bill list for “Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis.”)
- What kind of incentives can we provide to people who want to go into the mental health profession?

Issue One-Pager

Addressing Funding, Inclusion, and Supports in Special Education

Background

- In 2024-25, 171,000 students in Washington state's K-12 student population received special education services.
- In 2023-2024, school districts spent more than \$435 million than was received in special education funding.
- Our state faces a significant special education teacher and staff shortage.
- Washington state ranks 37th out of 50 states for inclusionary practices. Additional training is needed in high leverage teaching practices to ensure quality outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities made up 92.5% of those subjected to restraint and over 96% of students subject to isolation, even though they comprise a state average of about 15% of student enrollment.
- In the 2025 legislative session, the Legislature passed legislation that removed the arbitrary cap on enrollment for students with disabilities, increased the multiplier, and enhanced the safety net for higher-cost student services. It's important to say, "Thank you."

Talking Points/Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding) (pick 2-3 to raise)

- Funding for special education still is a one-size fits all situation, so it is important to continue to seek ways to equitably invest in special education services to meet individual student needs.
- Develop solutions to address a statewide special education staffing shortage.
- Encourage support for inclusionary practices while continuing specially designed instruction and accommodation when beneficial.
- Invest in training in best practices for students and classroom support.
- Ban isolation and reduce restraint of all students.

Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- What is the underfunding between the state and federal funding and actual costs to support educational programs for students with disabilities? How does your district make up this difference?
- Does your district face a shortage of special education teachers and staff? If so, how long have those positions been unfilled?
- What are your district's policies on isolation and restraint?

"Asks" of your legislators

- Is continuing to address the gap in special education funding a priority for your caucus this session?
- Do you support banning student isolation and reducing restraint in schools?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing this critical issue, such as _____? (Find current bill numbers on the [WSPTA blog](#) or in the Focus on Advocacy newsletters and look on the bill list for "Addressing Special Education Funding, Inclusion & Supports in Special Education.")

Issue One-Pager

Preventing and Reducing Gun Violence and Suicide

Background

- Firearms are the leading cause of death for American children.
- More than 370,000 American students have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine in April 1999 (Washington Post).
- 4.6 million children live in a home with at least one unlocked and loaded firearm - and access to unlocked firearms increases youth suicide risk almost tenfold.
- In Washington, suicide (primarily by firearm) is now the leading cause of death for youths 1-24, killing more than 150 children per year (Washington Department of Health).
- Living in a home with a firearm increases youth suicide risk four-fold.
- Black American youth are dying at 10 times the rate of white American youth.
- LGBTQIA2S+ youth are 5 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.

Talking Points/Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding)

- Fund school-based mental health services
- Require permits for firearm purchases
- Incentivize safe storage of firearms and medications
- Restrict bulk weapons purchases
- Fund community-based prevention and intervention programs

Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- How many gun-related “incidents” has your district had in the past year?
- Has your district had students die by gun violence or suicide in the past year? If yes, how many?
- What is your district doing to support mental health or students contemplating suicide?

“Asks” of your legislators

- Is preventing and reducing gun violence and suicide a priority for your caucus?
- Do you support community-based prevention and intervention?
- What expansion of our existing laws would you support to reduce the impact of gun violence on youth and families?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing this critical issue? (Find current bill numbers on the [WSPTA blog](#) or in the Focus on Advocacy newsletters and look on the bill list for “Preventing and Reducing Gun Violence and Suicide.”)

Issue One-Pager

Expanding School Construction Funding Options

Background

- School construction funding is critical to pay for the purchase of property, building new schools, modernizing and expanding existing schools, and increasing school safety.
- Some school districts can pass capital bonds and levies while others cannot, resulting in inequitable learning environments for students.
- Washington is one of only 11 states that require more than a 50% vote to pass school bonds.
- Between 2017 and 2024, 62.5% of all school bonds failed to meet the required 60% affirmative vote threshold. There were 53 that would have passed with a 55% requirement, and another 45 that would have passed at a simple majority of 50%. That means a total of 98 school bonds met a simple majority for bonds threshold, but their district's students were denied new or renovated schools due to the outdated 60% threshold.

Talking Points/Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding)

- Increase overall state funding and funding options for school construction projects and improvements.
- Provide equitable funding options so all school districts across the state can complete capital projects and improvements.
- Allow the voters to decide to lower the 60 percent super-majority to pass bonds to no more than 55 percent with a strong preference for a simple majority of 50 percent.

Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- Has the district failed a bond measure? If yes, did it meet the simple majority threshold and how close did it get to the 60 percent needed to pass?
- Has the district needed to delay maintenance, safety upgrades or new buildings due to lack of bond funding or lack of state school construction or planning resources? If so, what has been the impact?
- Has the district received a match from the state from the School Construction Assistance Program (SCAP)? If so, how much did the state provide compared to what the local taxpayers funded?
- Has your district shifted to using Capital levies instead of bonds? Why or why not?

"Asks" of your legislators

- Are you in favor of reducing the bond threshold to simple majority or 55 percent?
- Do you support letting the voters consider a constitutional amendment to reduce the bond threshold?
- What are obstacles for your support in voting to allow voters to decide about lowering the threshold or seeking a simple majority for school construction funding?
- In what ways would you modernize school construction funding to make it more streamlined - to deal with inflation costs, and to make it more equitable, to account for schools in areas with less tax base?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing this critical issue, such as _____? (Find current bill numbers on the [WSPTA blog](#) or in the Focus on Advocacy newsletters and look on the bill list for "Expanding School Construction Options."

Issue One-Pager

Bonus Funding-Related Advocacy Opportunity: Addressing the Unintended Burden of SB 5814 (2025) on School Districts

SB 5814, adopted by the Legislature in 2025, threatens to divert millions from school districts by imposing new sales taxes on essential school services. We need PTA members to advocate for an exemption for districts and urge legislators to clarify that schools should not be subject to this tax via a legislative fix in the 2026 session.

Background on SB 5814, enacted in the 2025 legislative session

- **Purpose of the Law:** [SB 5814](#) (see page 6 of the law) was adopted last session to help close a \$16 billion budget shortfall by expanding the retail sales tax to services previously untaxed.
- **Impact on Education Funding:** While expressly intended to fund education, the law added an average 10% sales tax to critical services, creating millions in unbudgeted expenses for school districts after their 2025-26 budgets had been adopted.
- **Net Effect:** The total statewide fiscal impact is not yet known but is likely upwards of \$100 million.

Talking Points/Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding)

- This tax was never intended for public schools.
- School districts rely on temporary staffing contracts to support services to individual students and groups of students.
 - Examples include contracting for physical therapy, occupational therapy, social workers, mental health counselors, nurses, speech language therapy and other services that districts must contract for rather than hiring full-time staff.
- School districts must provide training to teachers and other staff for state-required and local professional development and curriculum adoption. Charging sales taxes on these mandatory trainings doesn't make sense.
- Also included in this new sales tax on "live presentations" are activities like music concerts, theater events, and other enrichment activities that charge for admittance.
- Adding tax costs to school districts diverts funding away from students and student services, compounding district budget pressures.

Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows) -

- **Gather Local Data:**
 - Ask your school district if they have calculated the fiscal impact of SB 5814.
 - Determine expected costs and potential effects on staffing or student programs.
 - Share this info with your legislators and WSPTA

"Asks" of your legislators

- Work with your district to speak with local legislators about fixing the law in the 2026 session to clarify that it does not apply to school districts or organizations directly supporting students.